DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 141 449 UD 017 055

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TITLE The Follow Through Planned Variation Experiment: What is the Pay-Off?
PUB DATE 5 Apr 77
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New York, N.Y., April 5, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Agency Role; *Early Childhood Education; Educational Planning; *Educational Strategies; Evaluation Methods; Federal Legislation; *Federal Programs; Financial Policy; *History; *Minority Group Children; *Parent Participation; Program Administration; Social Action
IDENTIFIERS Economic Opportunity Act; Local Education Agencies; National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders; *Project Follow Through

ABSTRACT

This paper, written with a historical perspective, considers the impact of the Follow Through program on disadvantaged students. Social and economic conditions, attitudes, and political issues in disadvantaged communities are addressed. The target groups, fiscal decisions, and financial outlays under the Economic Opportunity Act are critically analyzed. The administration of the Follow Through program by the U.S. Office of Education (USOE) is examined. The roles and impact of parental involvement in the educational process are presented. The various policy changes of the program as a result of different Federal administrations are explored. The problems, implementation, and impact of the program relative to educational research strategies are discussed. A retrospective review of the length, nature, and implementation of the Follow Through program is analyzed and evaluated. The roles of Local Education Agencies (LEA) are examined. The three way relationship between the USOE, the model developers, and the LEA's is discussed. A summary statement of recommendations prepared by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders is contained in this report to indicate the scope of early intervention programs such as Follow Through. (JP)

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UD017055

Presented at
the Annual Meeting of the
American Educational Research Association
New York, April 5, 1977

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The Follow Through Planned Variation Experiment: What is the Pay-Off?

The Follow Through Program began in the 1960's, a most significant period in the history of this nation. A great social revolution was taking place as human cries for jobs, equality, and social justice permeated the land. Let us reflect for a moment on the underlying causes of this social unrest and, perhaps, gain some insight into the reasons for programs like Follow Through and their desired impact.

On June 27, 1967, President Lyndon Johnson succinctly described the situation in an address to the nation when he stated:

> "...The only genuine, long-range solution for what has happened lies in an attack--mounted at every level--upon the conditions that breed despair and violence. All of us know what those conditions are: ignorance, discrimination, slums, poverty, disease, and not enough jobs. We should attack these conditions -- not because we are frightened by conflict, but because we are fired by conscience. We should attack them because there is simply no other way to achieve a decent and orderly society in America..."

"A decent and orderly society" has been the aspiration of this nation long before the signing of the Declaration of Independence. In the 1960's the ills of our past suddenly manifested themselves and set the stage for future events.

Those whose cries were loudest were descendants of a people victimized by the Black Codes of the late 1860's, scorned in their attempts to gain equality during the 1950's, the subject of many civil rights

laws dating from the 1860's, and dwell at the bottom of the economic ladder. Their despair erupted in the 1960's and the nation was challenged to take note of their plight. For over two-hundred years a debate to educate or not to educate this segment of the population persisted. Many held and some still hold the position that they are uneducable.

Many of the children who entered the public school system in the 1960's had heard stories relative to their past. They witnessed the struggles of their parents and the courts to provide them a quality education. With this history and climate to shape their character and motivation for learning, we asked these children to block out their disenfranchisement, shed the cloak of inferiority thrust upon them by more than three-hundred years of strife and servitude, to blossom into competitive scholastic beings, and to perform at or above "national norms." What an enormous challenge this was for a school system and an external intervention agency. This was the challenge assumed by the Follow Through school districts and sponsors in the 1967-68 school year.

The scope of early intervention programs was outlined in a report prepared by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders published in March 1968 under Executive Order 11365 issued on July 29, 1967. The following recommendations were offered by the Commission reflecting concerns expressed in President Johnson's State of the Union message in 1967.

- Early childhood education programs should provide comprehensive educational support tailored to the needs of the child; and should not be simply custodial care. Both day care and Head Start components are part of comprehensive early childhood education; each should be designated to overcome the debilitating effect of a disadvantaged environment on learning ability.

- o Parents and the home environment have a critical impact on a child's early development. Early childhood programs should involve parents and the home, as well as the child. This can be accomplished through community education classes, and use of community aides and mothers' assistants. To reduce the incidence of congenital abnormalities, these community-based programs should be tied in with prenatal training.
- o Since adequate facilities are scarce in many disadvantaged communities, where schools are overcrowded, and other buildings deteriorated, the program should provide funds for special early childhood education facilities.
- o There is a need for maximum experimentation and variety. Funding should continue to support early childhood programs operated by community groups and organizations, as well as by the school system.
- o Early childhood education programs should include provisions for medical care and food, so that the educational experience can have its intended impact.

Here we are some ten years later reflecting upon the wisdom and impact of that charge as translated in the Follow Through Program. Under the Economic Opportunity Act, President Johnson requested 120 million dollars in fiscal year 1968 to serve up to 200,000 children in a massive program to address the psychological, social, nutritional, medical, and educational needs of the economically disadvantaged in a program called Follow Through that was administered in the U.S. Office of Education (USOE).

Before Congress passed the legislation the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) advanced 2.8 million dollars to USOE to initiate pilot projects in the summer of 1967 in 40 school districts.

When the OEO budget was finally authorized at one-eighth of that requested, it was clear that Follow Through could not receive the 120 million dollars expected. USOE received 15 million dollars for fiscal year 1968 of which 2.78 million that had been advanced by OEO for the operation of the 40 pilot projects had to be repaid. Consequently, a much more modest effort had to be initiated in the first year with a gradual expansion to address the universe of need expected to follow. By 1970 some 70 million dollars had been provided for 173 sites located in all fifty states and territories.

Throughout the country people were encouraged by the action of Congress in recognizing what many thought was the source of social unrest, eventhough the initial effort to tackle the problem was small. For the first time the education enterprise recognized the role parents can and must play in the education of their children. Parents as a political force in education were soon realized. It is easy to understand why Follow Through became in the minds of many a "social action service program" for children and their parents who expected many more federal dollars to be placed in the program for the elimination of the conditions being cited by the Administration, social action groups, and individuals throughout the country. The empetus was soon to experience its next test. While the country's attention and resources were being diverted from the problems at home to the armed conflict abroad, the social thrust lost some momentum. Follow Through could not be expanded to its conceived levels. Faced with this inevitability the Administration

chose to have Follow Through operate as an experimental program in a community service setting. This decision was not articulated well in Congress or across the country. Thus, the stage was set for a duality of understanding of the nature and thrust of the program. Some conceived it as strictly service; others operationalized it as research and evaluation. The dichotomy persisted within USOE which was given the administrative authority for the program in 1968.

The program survived the changing of the political guard in Washington and by 1970 reached its highest funding level of 70 million dollars. However, this was soon to change. Large national budget deficits were a continuing concern. The small service program was one source that could be reached and eventually eliminated. Since it did not rival the size of its predecessor programs such as Head Start and Title I, it was thought that an orderly phase-out could be affected. By 1971 the notion of phase-out based on a research argument was beginning to take shape. The research emphasis of Follow Through was deemed the vehicle to test innovations in education and when completed closed down. The results could then be shared with all school districts which could adopt the finding using their own resources.

By 1972 the plan was made public only to be met by a storm of protest from a well organized force of parents and community organizations. For the first time the political involvement of parents as developed by the Follow Through Program manifested itself. Congress, which viewed the program from a service perspective, was reminded of its view and commitment. For the next three years a debate over phase-out continued between Congress and the Administration with program proponents in the field proding the Congress at every sign of a threat. Clearly now, the service thrust of

the program was in evidence. Phase-out was abandoned in the Office of Education in 1976.

Let us examine what this means to the application of an educational research strategy in a social service setting. Follow Through was conceived in response to a major social problem. Participants and administrators in the field and in the Office of Education accepted the program for its service value. The immediate need was for service and the involvement of as many segments of communities as possible to help defuse some of the social unrest and to form the basis for upgrading the approximately 80,000 children who were to participate each year in the program. With the notion of a comprehensive program well established, Follow Through invited educators throughout the country to share in the development of the program. Every facet of the broad guidelines for a comprehensive service, social program was addressed. Most recognized the ineffectiveness of traditional methods; some focused on the home environment; some focused on the affective domain as a precursor to learning basic skills; some focused on basic skills acquisition; some chose socio-political action as a primary goal; all ascribed to a multiple approach to the solution to the problems of educating economically disadvantaged children and involving their parents. In general the twenty-two strategies adopted for Follow Through were implemented in school districts by popular demand. Some strategies were engineered by skillful sales people and earned a large number of districts for implementation, others were less skilled and gained only one or two districts. Some entered the contest for acceptance by USOE and site selection early, others entered late when the choices were few. It is safe to say that neither local school district staffs, model sponsor staffs, nor the program

operations staff in Washington conceived of the effort as strictly research or evaluation and, of course, did not treat it as such. The later to be described research and evaluation program was installed in a service setting without the benefit of even elementary experimental design considerations. Was there any widsom in attempting to implement a longitudinal planned variation experiment under these circumstances?

The wisdom of initiating a longitudinal planned variation experiment within the structure described here can be questioned. Very few, if any, of the requirements for an acceptable research paradigm were met. Random assignment of districts, schools, classes, or children was not attempted. Further, it was politically infeasible to consider such a strategy at that time. Most of the models were barely beyond the conceptual stage when they were implemented in schools. High attrition of children, teachers, and sites was common. The list of imponderables staggers the imagination. Yet, in 1967-68 the designers were faced with a program too small to be an ongoing service program and too large to be a workable research program. However, an unusual opportunity presented itself for the daring researcher. The question of what works in education for poor children in the early elementary grades could be studied on a large scale under various circumstances for the first time. The temptation and opportunities were too enormous to dismiss.

Upon reflection the decision to pursue a planned variation strategy had some merit. As the experiment evolved many of the model developers became more conscious of demands for good experimentation and the importance of articulating measurable goals and objectives. The general level of understanding of the experimental processes as applied in educational research was enhanced by the Follow Through Planned Variation for practioners in and out of the government. To those researchers operating from a puristic perspective developed through

years of classroom study, an opportunity was afforded to test their theoretical concepts in an operational setting. With most developers implementing their concepts in a variety of locations, the limited value of case studies, which most were accustomed to, became more evident as they were faced with the need to generalize the findings from such studies. Large scale multivariate models were more appropriate. Standard analytic tools were often stretched to their theoretical limits and beyond as anomalies in the data set and structural defects in designs began to show over the course of the experiment. In several institutions the level and quality of research activity showed marked improvements since their involvement in the Follow Through Program. For others research in education as defined in the Follow Through evaluation remains uninteresting. None the less the federal government provided educators throughout the country an opportunity to test their hypotheses about teaching young children. Several were not testable by conventional means; for others the means have yet to be invented.

Local education agencies (LEA) held a key position in the Follow Through Planned Variation Experiment. They were guardians over the most important experimental unit - the children. LEAs were asked to adopt an educational approach they considered to be in the best interest of their children and their community. This decision involved sharing the education responsibility of their children with an "outside" agency - a sponsor. In most instances this novel idea worked well and the outside agency was able to affect considerable change within the district. In other instances LEAs tolerated the interference of the change agent to assure continuation of federal funding. In only a few instances were the notions of experimentation taken seriously. There was an identified need and Follow Through was a vehicle to meet it. It was thought or hoped that the federal government

would learn how to best serve the need and to expand the service of others. Experimental pursuits on the part of USOE in which a limited facet of the program was being examined were of secondary importance in the LEAs. The hopes and aspirations and eventually the political coalition, due in part to the model sponsors, congealed around that point. LEAs soon recognized the role parents could play in the education enterprise. The classrooms were open to them where before they could only attend when invited or when there was a problem. Parents as resources in teaching children were noted and developed along with their political importance. The Follow Through program brought parents into the classroom and into education as decision makers. LEAs profited from their assumed role. Parents were used as data collectors in the classroom as part of the national evaluation effort. They were able to examine the instruments on which the performance of their children would be based. The controversy over the appropriateness of standardized tests was surfaced in the districts, among model developers, and the U.S. Office of Education as it became more apparent that this would be a key area of focus by the national evaluation. The conflict persists without a clear solution. LEAs used standardized tests as barometers of performance; the government use of them was conceived as a threat to the continuation of the program in their district and in general. The national evaluation had gained an image of a villian, seeking out ineffective models and sites and eliminating them on the basis of standardized tests alone without proper recognition of "all the other good things" being done. To abort any impending dangers of termination many sites deviated from the models in an effort to improve the performance of children on the national evaluation tests battery. The districts that had ascribed to innovation and the concepts of experimentation, if only periph-

erally, had parted completely from the notion of planned variation. LEAs gained immensely from the Follow Through program; some even gained from the attempted experiment. Instructional components developed and implemented by model sponsors left their impact on most districts. Some entire districts are adopting features of Follow Through Models they deem to be successful. However, it is not evident that the Follow Through experiment has appreciably modified how districts use data to improve the operation of their schools.

USOE is the third member of the triumvirate attempting to bring innovation into local school districts. After considerable deliberation over how the program would operate - either service or experiment, the USOE tried to focus on "what works" from among the various models tested. USOE was even further removed from the point of ultimate implementation - the schools - than the model developers. The perceptions and wishes of USOE, and to some lesser extent the model developers, relative to experimentation were not always translated into operational terms. It is likely that the underlying assumption of the federal government's role as viewed by Congress was that social reform could be affected through education. The validity of this assumption is still a point of controversy, but it did not receive much attention in the experiment. As time elasped the gap between the focus of research and the attenuated policy relevant issues widened.

From a perspective within USOE some points are now clear. A program as Follow Through was conceived to be by the Congress is grounded in the hopes and aspirations of their constituents and will be treated as a service program regardless of its size or redirection within the operating divisions in the USOE. It is best to recognize the limitations in conducting field experiments under such circumstances. Considerably more time should be applied to ascertaining from a variety of sources the pertitent questions

requiring answers and the relevant variables and hypotheses that should be tested. USOE must recognize that there are several levels of decision makers - administrators of local school systems, local communities, parents, and children - in the educational enterprise, many of whom exert as much or more authority in local school districts as the federal government. Most have very different types of information requirements. Considerable time and effort should be spent to understand these needs and translate them into a few sets of working hypotheses for examination.

Cognitive outcomes may be the least important information requirements for local school officials. As in 1967 when Follow Through began, considerable concern continues to focus on order and safety in the schools, attendance, family mobility, and attitudes toward learning. Because of the all encompassing scope of the program a limited set of outcomes received attention in the national evaluation. Many of the process variables of interest to local administrators, teachers, and parents did not receive much attention, eventhough some could provide less ambiguous information than that from standardized tests.

One of the key variables in considering a planned variation experiment is implementation. USOE made the assumption that the models were well enough defined to be implementable when they entered the program. This proved to be erroneous for most models. USOE further assumed the existence of an operating delivery system. As with the basic philosophical development of the model, the delivery system, in most irstances, was not equipped to deal with the vagaries found in the districts. Most of the models did not develop instructional approaches until late into the program. It is safe to say that evaluators did not know what was implemented in the various sites. Without knowing what was implemented it is virtually impossible to select valid effectiveness measures.

USOE's haste to launch the field experiment precluded rational judgment in several instances - starting the evaluation before model developement and implementation had taken place, focusing on an unpopular set of outcomes, and raising expectation levels from the experiment too high.

It should be clear to USOE that a "scatter gun" approach to innovation in education can not be demonstrated to work. Hindsight is a marvelous teacher and in large scale experimentations an expensive one. It should also be clear to USOE that a set of field trials to identify implementation strategies and measurable objectives using the most developed models should have been the first step before launching a planned variation experiment. There was no compelling reason why the evaluation had to be initiated at the inception of the program, nor was there a need to focus on all the models. Considerable information could have been realized from a less ambitious approach with a few implemented sites and models under the full direction of researchers and evaluators. Process and formative evaluation strategies should be considered along with summative evaluations. Some focus on program operations and management would have satisfied many of the requirements of the operating division of the program.

The three way relationship between USOE, model developers, and LEAs seems to have worked well in many places. Fresh new ideas were brought to LEAs in the early years of the program. Aspiration levels were high among the participants. The presence of USOE was generally felt at refunding negotiations and field reviews conducted periodically to assure compliance with the terms of the grants. The depth of support within the districts coupled with an awareness of the political processes often precluded USOE from making decisions that may be deemed unpopular. USOEs administrative role, from the perspective of this writer, was less than effective due in part to ambiguities about the goals of the program within USOE and the perceptions of local administrators.

Model developers, too, have a vested interest.

The working relationship between LEA's and model developers has been generally favorable. Model developers were conceived as a resource. Teachers received specialized training, a rich set of instructional materials was provided, and the community resources were tapped as sponsors aggressively developed a range of activities. Generally, support of the sponsors was high among teachers, school officials, and parents. In some districts the relationship disintergrated almost as fast as it began. Implementation never occurred to any extent, and in many of these instances the districts were allowed to continue in the program.

For ten years now the relationship has survived. The pact that binds the three parties has been tested on many fronts. Each year more and more districts seek to discontinue the participation of the model developer. The chief reason being that the sponsor has exhausted what he had to offer. The knowledge base within the district has been sufficiently primed to carry on the precepts of the model on its own. On the other hand sponsors cite that their staffs have grown weary of doing the same things in the same districts. Fresh new districts or a different focus for their developed capacities would bloster their desire to continue. In USOE the debate over service vs. experiment continues. It is the view of this writer that if the program continues into the distant future at the current funding level of 59 million dollars per year and without internal political intervention, the service thrust is likely to survive with a de-emphasis of experimentation. The involvement of model developers with school districts is likely to continue with some modifications.

The results of the current research and evaluation efforts could be used to pinpoint problems in model instructional programs, philosophical bases, and

delivery systems. Model developers could then be encouraged to modify their programs to reflect the new thinking within USOE. This would be a significant departure from current practices. The planned variation paradigm such as it were in Follow Through would virtually terminate. Very few shifts from existing models and districts are anticipated.

One point is very clear. In addition to being too large the duration of the experiment was too long. The program is now into its fourth political administration. It continues on the strength of its political and grass roots support and not on the strength of its research findings. With each changing of the guard a different set of national priorities is established. Different questions are being asked of the education enterprise. Levels of expectation among parents, teachers, community action agencies, and school administrators change with the tenor of the times.

If a planned variation study had to be done, a five year effort would have been sufficient involving less than a half dozen models. The number of replications of the models should have been determined after decisions about the goals of the experiment and types of estimates on the outcome measures had been made. With a fixed time frame and predetermined evaluation goals all participants would know what to expect and when to expect it. Teachers should be offered long term contracts, where possible, to minimize the high turnover rates resulting from uncertainty of employment from year to year. More attention should be paid the building principal. Often the principal is the last to know what the experiment is all about and can, unknowingly, sabotage it.

Now that we have a telescopic view of the Follow Through Planned Variation Experiment, what do we know about the questions addressed in the evaluation? Before examining those questions it is important to consider the question in the minds of many in the administration and in Congress during the 1960's - can

education be used to solve social problems? The Follow Through evaluation did not address this question directly, however, the program offers some clues. The Follow Through program afforded an opportunity for adults to become directly involved in the educational enterprise. Some learned the workings of the political process, others learned classroom procedures and were exposed to teaching styles advocated by the various models, others completed secondary education training, while a few earned college degrees made possible by Follow Through funds, and some became classroom teachers, nurses aids, medical technicians, etc. While there is no empirical evidence from the experiment to suggest the lessening of social problems through education, it is reasonable to infer that the upgrading of adults in poverty will help them to become more productive citizens. Poverty was one of the causes of social unrest. The comprehensive service and training components of the Follow Through program may have had some impact on the social unrest issue. Time and directed research are required to provide answers to this question.

The Follow Through Planned Variation Experiment has produced considerable information from many sources - sponsors, LEA, national evaluation. Much of it is unclear and inconclusive for all the reasons and more noted herein. Yet, some relatively consistent patterns have emerged to address the question, what works?

Twenty two models representing various philosophical orientations about teaching young children and/or involving their parents were funded by Follow Through. Over the course of the program almost 50 percent of participating children were Black, 31 percent White, 14 percent of Spanish origin, five percent American Indian, and the remainder representing other minority groups. The results of this monumental effort are summarized in Table I representing a synthesis of findings from all data sources.

First, five categories of models were arbitrarily established to reflect the general orientation of the models. Second, four levels of effectiveness were determined: (1) Generally effective - models that had statistically reliable data favoring the model in the basic skills domain; (2) marginally effective - models that had statistically reliable results in at least one of the evaluative domains, (3) Inconclusive - models that had conflicting data or data with questionable validity, (4) Generally ineffective - models that had mostly data supporting the comparison schools. Third, this writer combined the information gleamed from the data with a first hand knowledge of communities, classrooms, and sponsors to arrive at a "technical/non-technical " conclusion. This approach was necessitated by the myriad of data submitted for review and in recognition of the basic structural deficiencies in the national evaluation. After seven years of intensive effort, we believe that these conclusions have practical merit, if not theoretical soundness in each instance.

The conclusions summarized in Table I are as follows:

- o Educational philosophies based on a well defined curriculum with emphasis on the development of basic skills generally produce meaningful gains over a variety of cognitive and affective outcome measures. Three of five models had generally effective or marginally effective results in this category with two producing inconclusive results.
- o Three of the eight models in the category "Home/Classroom Learning Environment produced marginally effective results.
- o Eight models produced inconclusive evidence. Further investigation is recommended before definitive conclusions can be reached.

- Five models operating in the Follow Through Program are deemed generally ineffective over a range of cognitive and affective measures. Two are in the category "Home/Classroom Learning Environment" and three are in the relaxed Classroom Learning Environment.
- Models based on the use and development of the home language and culture produced meaningful effects over the range of outcome measures.
- Models with a definitive set of instructional objectives in the cognitive and conceptual domains produced expected outcomes.
- Models with an ecclectic philosophy and a wide range of goals do not produce expected results in basic skills over the first four years of schooling. There is some evidence to suggest that cognitive growth occurs later in a child's academic life.

After an expenditure of over 30 million dollars to evaluate the Follow Through program, no clear precise answers are possible. This is not to condem the effort, for it has been the most elaborate undertaken in social research. Were it not for the persistence of many people in and out of government our level of awareness relative to the difficulties of planned variation experiments in a social setting would not have been enhanced. What has been learned should place future researchers well ahead of the game. The ones who have endured this attempt will approach new challenges with a lot more savvy.

TABLE 1 OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL EVALUATION RESULTS FROM THE FOLLOW THROUGH PLANNED VARIATION EXPERIMENT

Categories of Model	Number of Models	Generally Effective	Marginally Effective	Inconclusive	Generally Ineffective
Community Action	1*	--	--	--	--
Home Learning Environment	1*	--	--	--	--
Home/Classroom Learning Environment	9*	0	3	3	2
Structured Classroom Learning Environment	5	2	1	2	0
Relaxed Classroom Learning Environment	6	0	0	3	3
Total	22(19)*	2	4	8	5

* The community action model was discontinued in 1975; Home Learning Environment model was non-instructional and omitted from summative evaluation discussions; one model from the Home/Classroom Learning Environment Category was discontinued in 1975. These three models were omitted from the totals. Only 19 models were considered.